

# Operating in Saudi Arabia

A Different Perspective



INSIGHTS

## Understanding the challenges in KSA is key to entering the market, says Ian Chambers, CEO of Linea

Across the healthcare sector, organisations are watching the evolution of the Saudi Arabian healthcare market. As the Kingdom undergoes the biggest national transformation to date, and perhaps the most ambitious healthcare change globally, there are many challenges that lie ahead in the quest to make the system seamlessly efficient across the 22 new Clusters in the country.

With a huge workforce, a population of 35.84m and an area of 830,000 square miles, the task is daunting. However, there is a vast amount of talent and expertise at the Ministry of Health and there is also a wealth of sector knowledge outside the Kingdom that is available.

For [Ian Chambers](#), CEO of [Linea](#), there is a need for overseas organisations to think differently around their offer to the Saudi market. “Saudi Arabia is trailblazing – it hasn’t been done before, certainly not on this scale and at this pace,” he says. “But true visions are designed to challenge convention. However, taking the best elements from different markets and joining them together doesn’t work. Key is shaping those aspects into coherent solutions which align to the regional dynamics, environment and culture to exceed patient expectations.”



## Working Together

For nearly two decades, [Linea](#) has supported prominent UK and international organisations in achieving exceptional performance and continuous improvement. Working in partnership with clients, the company has developed an enviable track record of rapid and sustainable improvement, overcoming complex challenges to deliver significant, sustainable savings.

For Ian, the most important underlying consideration is the company culture and purpose of the organisation. "Employees need to understand the culture of the organisation to see how they can support its objectives."

The overarching goal is the creation of a culture of continuous improvement. There will always be an element that needs to be robustly managed with processes, but the key is to empower people to achieve more. The challenge is how to optimise the progress while aligning the various change aspects, which means overcoming the issues with implementation, adaption and flexibility required to drive success.

"Strategic alignment and deployment is essential to ensure the organisation is progressing to true north. However, strategic understanding can be diluted, particularly with operational team members who often aren't multilingual and struggle to understand or translate reports, practices and processes derived in English. Consideration needs to be given as to how concepts translate in Arabic or the Saudi language and culture, but this is much easier with international and Arabic expertise within the team."

Complexity can also be a challenge, resulting from the scope of clinical work and the resources required to deliver it effectively as part of a healthcare system. One of the biggest frustrations for clinicians is the inability to operate at maximum capacity which can be a result of equipment issues, but more often than not results from poor administrative processes, scheduling and the underlying lack of system interoperability across clinics, hospitals and regions.

"Anyone involved in leadership and group dynamics will recognise the need for organisations to have a blend of people, personalities and approaches which, if pulled together in the same direction with a common goal, can drive innovation and transformation locally, regionally and nationally," Ian says.

## Adapting the offer

For overseas companies seeking to enter the Saudi market, product and service adaptation is vital, as is understanding customs and practices. For example, many Middle Eastern markets generally operate on much longer payment lead-times than customary in European markets. Such payment delays put pressure on company resources and increase risk. Minimising such pressures and risks is essential.

One way to do this is through collaboration with other companies and partners. Another approach is the formulation of consortia which integrate skills and expertise to create a holistic market offer. Market access frameworks are also a great approach in accessing local expertise, mitigating risk and enabling market adoption.

“If you have a compelling offer, it’s definitely worth exploring Saudi Arabia as it is on a big trajectory of change with significant opportunities to support the improvement. However, it isn’t a decision that should be taken lightly – it takes patience and commitment,” he thinks. “People often don’t appreciate the size of the country – it is very diverse in its geography and climate. The needs are wide-ranging, so it is important to focus on where you want to be and perhaps find a local partner who can supply the missing parts.

“The Saudis are very knowledgeable, experienced and professional with a clear desire to drive real change. Operating in Saudi Arabia is always a two-way street as there is a lot to be learned and taught. From a UK perspective, transformation is often constrained by limited funds and political challenges, but Vision 2030 from a healthcare perspective is driving truly innovative transformational change for the Saudi people. The sheer scale of the vision and programme is breathtaking.

The option for organisations is to understand how they can support the vision of transformation and deal with the challenges.” There is plenty of advice available, from businesses with wide experience in the region, as well as the Department for International Trade in the UK, local embassies as well as commercial support organisations such as AEI and obviously Healthcare World.

“Clearly programmes of this nature require momentum and, while great progress has been made, continued scale and improvement present new challenges. Sharing and learning from improvement experiences both within Saudi Arabia and other markets is paramount for companies looking to enter this dynamic market”



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